DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 947 UD 025 502

AUTHOR Fordham, Signithia
TITLE Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students' School Success: Pragmatic Strategy or Pyrrhic Victory?
SPONS AGENCY Spencer Foundation, Chicago, Ill.
PUB DATE 4 Dec 86
NOTE 45p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (85th, Philadelphia, PA, December 3-7, 1986). For related documents, see UD 025 503-504.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Adolescents; *Black Achievement; *Black Students; Coping; *Ethnicity; Group Unity; High Schools; High School Students; *Kinship; Racial Attitudes; Social Mobility; Social Structure; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex relationship between black adolescents' ethnic identity, school performance, and the effect of the larger social structure on the interaction of these phenomena by reference to the concept of racelessness. This concept captures the endemic tensions and conflicts experienced by black Americans as they seek to define their relationship to the dominant society. Despite the growing acceptance of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the larger American society, a strong ethnic identity in the school context appears to be negatively sanctioned among black adolescents. The paper is divided into four sections. The first, presenting the theoretical model undergirding the proposed analysis, describes the structure of the shared cultural system--fictive kinship--existing in the black community as background data. The second section reviews existing research literature and autobiographical data on the efficacy of racelessness as a strategy for academic excellence and vertical mobility. The third part reviews research suggesting that black students must develop a raceless persona to achieve academic success. The fourth and final section concludes with implications and suggestions for minimizing the need for racelessness as a strategy for social mobility and academic excellence among black adolescents. A six-page reference list is appended. (LHW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

3-12-87

ED281947

RACELESSNESS AS A FACTOR IN BLACK STUDENTS' SCHOOL SUCCESS: PRAGMATIC STRATEGY OR PYRRHIC VICTORY?

Signithia Fordham

Department of Anthropology
The American University

and

Department of Educational and Psychological Foundations
The University of the District of Columbia
Washington, D.C.

Presented at the Symposium
"The Development and Maintenance
of Cultural Identity"

85th Annual Meeting
American Anthropological Association
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
December 4, 1986

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Fordham
U. of D.C.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Pre-publication draft:
Not for citation without author's permission

UD 025 502

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank The Spencer Foundation for partial financial support of the larger study from which this analysis is abstracted. I am also grateful to Dr. John U. Ogbu, whose work influenced my research and who, as my mentor and friend, offered helpful comments and criticisms of an early draft of this manuscript. I am also grateful to my research associate, Linda K. Goldstein, who edited and typed several versions of this paper.

I. INTRODUCTION

In my earlier analyses (see Fordham 1981a, 1981b, 1982a, 1982b, 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Fordham and Ogbu in press), I have argued that Black Americans are enjoined and constrained by a viable and active cultural system, their subordination in the larger American social system notwithstanding. Also, I have tried to demonstrate how this existing cultural system--symbolized by what I have labeled fictive kinship--was forged from an African base sanctioned by the group during the period of legal enslavement and on into the present century. Additionally, I argued that because Black Americans are forced to undergo dual socialization (see DuBois 1970; Hale 1982; Valentine 1971), or what some social scientists call biculturalism (Taylor 1973; Valentine 1971), they frequently must make a conscious effort to either strongly identify with the existing, indigenous Black American cultural system or, alternatively, seek disaffiliation by identifying more strongly with the larger, dominant social system. More importantly, I argued that the exercising of either of these options in the school context has enormously significant implications for Black adolescents' academic performance, resulting in either massive academic underachievement or high achievement on school measures of success. More recently, I have identified some of the specific strategies which academically successful Black students develop in order to "cope with the burden of 'acting white'" (see Fordham 1985a, 1985b; Fordham and Ogbu in press). In conjunction with that argument, I postulated that such strategies are necessary because, paradoxically, while a raceless persona among Black Americans weakens group cohesion and solidarity, it promotes the willingness on the part of Black adolescents to pursue academic excellence. The point

being stressed in this analysis is that, contrary to the often cited claim that "the [Black American] is only an American and nothing else[; h]e has no values and culture to guard and protect" (Glazer and Moynihan 1963:53), the cultural system extant in the Black community, identified here as a fictive kinship system, is a total cultural system, to which all persons socially defined as Black Americans are "eternally bound and obligated irrespective of [their] economic, educational or social status" (my emphasis; Taylor 1973:12). It is this social reality which mandates that Black Americans make a conscious choice to seek disaffiliation or a raceless persona in order to enhance their vertical mobility aspirations. In other words, the coexisting albeit competing cultural systems which are responsible for the dual socialization experience of Black Americans, vie for psychological dominance of individual members in the Black community. This "competition" does not formally begin until the Black child enters school.

Massive evidence exists which supports the claim made here that the American system of public schooling mandates an orientation on the part of Black and other nondominant-group children which strips them of most of the "flaws" or differences which are, in part at least, culturally based (see Cohen 1971; Dickeman 1973; Scanzoni 1977). Nowhere was this effort more apparent than in the compensatory preschool programs of the 1960s (see Mitchell 1982) and the general war-on-poverty programs of the Johnson Administration.

This paper examines the complex relationship between Black adolescents' ethnic identity, school performance and the effect of the larger social structure on the interaction of these phenomena by reference to the concept of racelessness. The term "racelessness" embodies the multiple tensions which emerge in the school context between the state-sponsored curriculum, teacher

expectations, Black adolescents' ethnic identity and feelings of group loyalty. The resulting conflict and ambivalence, as well as the ultimate value of the development of a raceless persona are at the center of this analysis, leading to the question: "Is racelessness among Black adolescents a pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory?" Essentially, this concept--racelessness--captures the endemic tensions and conflicts experienced by Black Americans as they seek to define their relationship to the dominant society. More specifically, a major assumption of this analysis is that, despite the growing acceptance of ethnicity and ethnic identity in the larger American society, a strong ethnic identity in the school context appears to be negatively sanctioned among Black adolescents. Hence, racelessness appears to be the term best able to describe the persona most conducive to school success among Black adolescents. Apparently, this concept can be discussed at various levels of analysis; however, as operationally defined in this paper, racelessness denotes the conscious albeit frequently non-verbalized efforts of Black Americans to minimize their ethnic and racial identity, both in and outside the school contexts, by incorporating into their behavior repertoire: (1) skills and characteristics which are not generally attributed to Black Americans; and (2) greater acceptance and conformance to those cultural features, i.e., values, beliefs and customs most often attributed to white Americans and the dominant social system. The term "racelessness" is also used to denote the tendency of the larger society to promote and reward this practice among Black Americans in and outside the school context, while at the same time negatively sanctioning strong group affiliation among Black people. Hence, a raceless persona among Black adolescents appears to promote school success.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section of the paper presents the theoretical model undergirding the proposed analysis. In this

section, I briefly describe the structure of the shared cultural system--fictive kinship--existing in the Black community (see Fordham 1981b, 1982b, 1985a, 1985b; Fordham and Ogbu in press) as background data for the analysis I am proposing here. In the second section of the paper, I review existing research literature and autobiographical data on the efficacy of racelessness as a strategy for academic excellence and vertical mobility.[1] The third part of the paper reviews my recent research which suggests that in order to achieve academic success, Black students must develop a raceless persona. The fourth and final section of the paper concludes with implications and suggestions for minimizing the need for racelessness as a strategy for social mobility and academic excellence among Black adolescents. This section of the paper also offers some insight into the efficacy of racelessness, i.e., whether it is a pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical model used here--fictive kinship--is rooted in (1) Ogbu's (1978) cultural ecological analysis which highlights the relationship between adult subsistence tasks or jobs and careers, and the school performance of various social groups and (2) the growing anthropological literature which posits a correlative relationship between a particular human

---

[1]DeVos (1967) makes an unequivocal distinction between vertical and lateral mobility, indicating that, frequently, enclaved social groups experience lateral but not vertical mobility. Following DeVos, I am suggesting here that Black Americans most often experience horizontal but not vertical mobility in the dominant social system. Hence, the idea of vertical mobility suggests movement and employment in arenas and domains which are not usually open to Black applicants. In other words, this view of social mobility suggests more than the mere movement of Black Americans from the agricultural South to the urban North and continued employment in low-status and menial jobs, with the primary difference being the employment context. Instead, vertical mobility is the structural assimilation (see Gordon 1964) of Black Americans in the existing social system.

type--persistent peoples--and an oppositional cultural process (Fordham and Ogbu in press; Green 1981; Kushner and Castile 1981; Spicer 1971, 1980) which undermines academic effort in the school context.

In this paper, I am proposing a theoretical model--fictive kinship--which is a synthesis of the oppositional process and Ogbu's (1978) cultural ecological model. This Black American cultural feature emerged from the oppositional process between Black and white Americans, and has implications for many aspects of Black American life and culture, including school performance and behavior. In studying the twin phenomena of oppositional social identity and oppositional cultural frame of reference among Black Americans, I have found the anthropological concept fictive kinship (see Fordham 1981b, 1985a, 1985b) an appropriate one to convey their meanings. Among anthropologists, the umbrella term "fictive kinship" is used when kinship terminology refers to people within the society to whom one is not necessarily related by birth (Bloch 1971; see also Brain 1972; Folb 1980:1-26; Fortes 1969:239-242; Freed 1973; Hale 1982:48; Liebow 1967; Norbeck and Befu 1958; Pitt-Rivers 1968, 1973:90-91; Stack 1974; Staples 1975, 1981). As used in this analysis, fictive kinship refers to a kinship-like relationship between persons not related by blood or marriage in a society, but who have some reciprocal social or economic relationship. There is usually a native term for it, or a number of native terms expressing or indicating its presence (Brain 1972; Freed 1973; Norbeck and Befu 1958; Pitt-Rivers 1968). Fictive kinship in the anthropological sense also exists among Black Americans. Sometimes Black people refer to persons in that kind of relationship as "play-kin" (Shimkin, Shimkin and Frate 1978). However, as conceptualized in the study reported here, the anthropological definition of fictive kinship has been broadened to encompass the self-definition of an entire social group:

Black Americans. The definition of this anthropological concept has been stretched to capture the essence of the oppositional process within the Black community and between Black and white Americans.

This wider definition of fictive kinship among Black Americans conveys the idea of "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" of all Black Americans. This sense of peoplehood or collective social identity is evident in numerous kinship and pseudo-kinship terms that Black Americans use to refer to one another. I am using the term "fictive kinship" in the second, wider sense; that is, fictive kinship is used to denote a cultural symbol of collective identity among Black Americans.

More specificially, fictive kinship is used to describe the particular mind set, i.e., the specific world view of those persons who are appropriately labeled "Black." Since "Blackness" is more than a skin color, fictive kinship is the concept used to denote the moral judgment the group makes on its members (see Brain 1972). Essentially, the concept suggests that the mere possession of African features and/or being of African descent does not automatically make one a Black person, nor does it suggest that one is a member in good standing of the group. One can be black in color, but choose not to seek membership in the fictive kinship system, and/or be denied membership by the group because one's behavior, activities, and lack of manifest loyalty are at variance with those thought to be appropriate and group-specific.

As I view it, the Black American fictive kinship system developed from their responses to two types of treatment from white Americans. One is the economic and other instrumental exploitation by whites both during and after slavery (Anderson 1975; Bullock 1970; Drake and Cayton 1970; Myrdal 1944; Spivey 1978). The other kind of treatment is the tendency of white Americans

historically to treat Black Americans as an undifferentiated mass of people, ascribing to them indiscriminately certain inherent strengths and weaknesses. It appears that Black Americans have generally responded by inverting the negative stereotypes and assumptions of whites into positive and functional attributes (Fordham 1982a, 1982b; Holt 1972; Ogbu 1983). Thus, Black Americans may have transformed white people's assumptions of Black homogeneity into a collective identity system and a coping strategy.

An example of collective treatment by white Americans which may have promoted the formation of Black people's sense of collective identity in opposition to white identity and expressed the oppositional identity in the idiom of fictive kinship occurred following Nat Turner's "insurrection" in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831. After that incident whites restricted the movement of Black Americans as well as Black contact amongst themselves, ragardless of their place of residence or personal involvement in the insurrection (Haley 1976; Styron 1966). Even Black children in Washington, D.C., were forbidden by whites from attending Sunday School with white children after the incident, although local whites knew that Black children in Washington, D.C., had no part in the insurrection. What was well understood by Black people in Southampton, Virginia, in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere in the country was that the onus for Turner's behavior was extended to all Black Americans solely on the basis of their being Black. Numerous arbitrary treatments of this kind, coupled with a knowledge that they were denied true assimilation into the mainstream of American life, encouraged Black Americans to develop what DeVos (1967) calls "ethnic consolidation," a sense of peoplehood (Green 1981) expressed in fictive kinship feelings and language.

Because fictive kinship symbolizes Black Americans' sense of peoplehood in opposition to white American social identity, I suggest that it is closely tied to their various boundary-maintaining behaviors and attitudes towards white people. An example is the tendency for Black Americans to emphasize group loyalty in situations involving conflict or competition with whites. Furthermore, Black people have a tendency to negatively sanction behaviors and attitudes they consider to be at variance with their group identity symbols and criteria of membership. Since only Black Americans are involved in the evaluation of group members' eligibility for membership in the fictive kinship system, they control the criteria used to judge one's worthiness for membership, and the criteria are totally group-specific. That is, the determination and control of the criteria for membership in the fictive kinship system are in contrast to the determination and control of the criteria for earning grades in school or promotion in the mainstream workplace by white people. Fictive kinship means a lot to Black people because they regard it as the ideal by which members of the group are judged; it is also the medium through which Black Americans distinguish "real" from "spurious" members (Williams 1981a, 1981b).

Black children learn the meaning of fictive kinship from their parents and peers while they are growing up. And it appears that the children learn it early and well enough so that they more or less unconsciously, but strongly, tend to associate their life chances and "success" potential with those of their peers and members of their community. Group membership is important in Black peer relationships; as a result, when it comes to dealing with whites and white institutions, the unexpressed assumption guiding behavior seems to be that "my brother is my brother regardless of what he does or has done" (Haskins 1975; Sargent 1984) or, as one politician put it recently, a "culture of forgiveness" is the norm.

III. RACELESSNESS AS A VERTICAL MOBILITY STRATEGY

A raceless persona among Black adolescents is obviously either a conscious or unconscious effort on the part of such students to disaffiliate with the fictive kinship system described above. This emphasis on racelessness as an upward mobility strategy appears to have emerged in response to the oppressive presence and importance of race in determining whether individual Black Americans achieve vertical as opposed to mere horizontal mobility. The following quotation from David Bradley (1982), author of The Chaneysville Incident, suggests the pervasive presence and importance of race as a factor in the lives of Black Americans:

> I am a Black.... I suppose I still believe that there is a place in space or time where the pigmentation of my skin might be of only incidental relevance--where it would be possible to give a socially meaningful description of who I am and what I've done without using the word black at all. I have abandoned the belief that somewhere or somewhen will turn out to be here and now. So, for all practical purposes, I accept a belief that I have taken to calling achromism (from the Greek a-, meaning "not" and chroma, meaning "color"), which is that within the context of the society to which I belong by right--or misfortune--of birth, nothing I shall accomplish or discover or earn or inherit or buy or sell or give away--nothing I shall ever do--will outweigh the fact of my race in determining my destiny (my emphasis; Bradley 1982:58-59).

The emergence of racelessness as a coping strategy in the Black community appears to be an adaptive response to the kind of situation described by Bradley (1982), where race appears to be one of the most prominent obstacles to vertical mobility in the Black community. In an effort to minimize the disfiguring effects of race on their vertical mobility aspirations, some Black Americans have begun to incorporate into their behavior repertoire skills and characteristics which are generally not attributed to Black Americans. However, there are often unforeseen costs associated with becoming an

"un-Black" person. The following examples from the world of work and the school context--Black and white--are instructive.

In an article about the achievements of a Black disc jockey in Washington, D.C., Gaines-Carter (1984) describes him in the following manner:

> The voice is quiet thunder. Seductive. He stretches words, rolls them around in his mouth. Because his voice is neither black nor white and favors no geographical region, there has been some confusion about his racial identity. "I've had people look at me like I'm a ghost," says the 30-year-old disc jockey. "Some of them were expecting a white person. I hate for people to say I sound white. I don't. It's a matter of speaking properly, and anyone can do that" (Gaines-Carter 1984:6).

From the inside looking out, Mitchell (1982) describes how her role as a teacher in a preschoos program led to (1) the emergence of a perception in the Black community of a raceless persona on her part by the mothers of the children she taught and (2) confusion and uncertainty on her part about her true racial identity. She writes:

> Although I was black and less conspicuous than my white colleagues, I also attracted attention, but in a different sense. My professional attire identified me, in this community, as a "middle-class", "siddity", "uppity", "insensitive", school teacher who had made her way out of the ghetto, who had returned to "help and save", and who would leave before dark to return to the suburbs. My speech set me up as a prime candidate for suspicion and distrust. Speaking standard English added to the badges that my role had already pinned on me. The tags with which I was labeled during my initial encounters with the women were often painful, and in my attempts to shake them off I felt compelled, at every opportunity, to clarify my identity.... [T]he middle-class black woman is often perceived by the poor women in the black community as an agent of the system, rigid in mannerisms and judgmental in attitude (Mitchell 1982:31).

Hence it is clear, from Mitchell's assessment of the problems she encountered in the role she occupied, that her acceptance by the dominant society made her a target of suspicion in the Black community, her similar racial group membership notwithstanding. This appears to be true, in part at least,

because, ironically, the members of the Black community where she was employed perceived her as "the enemy" in the same way as her white counterparts. Despite the fact that, like them, she is a Black American, her acceptance/success as defined by the dominant society made her appear raceless to other members of the Black community.

Perhaps no recent example more clearly typifies the tensions endemic to the racelessness issue in the work arena than the recent suicide of Leanita McClain, a journalist and the first Black American female to be elected to the Chicago Tribune's Board of Directors. Having grown up in a predominantly Black community in Chicago and subsequently achieving enormous success in a white-dominated profession, her sense of belonging and self-confidence were seriously undermined. To her white colleagues at the Tribune, McClain appeared raceless, indistinguishable from them. Her response to the social pressure of being in an environment which was largely unknown to other Black Americans was to conceal her emotions behind a carefully constructed public mask. Klose (1984) insists that at the base of McClain's dilemma were "fundamental issues of her own identity," not knowing who she was. He cites evidence from a brief essay McClain wrote as a teenager, which suggests a denial of the existing social reality vis-a-vis racial issues and a commitment on her part to both the development of a raceless persona and integration as a social reality:

> "Why is there so much hate and contempt among people? I have never been blocked from anything because of my color, and I'm not ashamed of it either. My great grandfather was Caucasian and so was my great grandmother.... Why can't people just be people and live in peace and harmony? Maybe I'm in search of the perfect world. Or maybe I'm just me. That's it. I'm me. But to be me is to be nothing--to be nothing is to be me. And I love all people. Even pink polka-dotted ones with olive ears" (cited in Klose 1984:C2).

In fact, in her own assessment of her personal anguish, she notes the personal "transformation" and anguish she feels regarding her previous total commitment to integration:

> I am burdened daily with showing whites that blacks are people. I am, in the old vernacular, a credit to my race...my brothers' keeper, and my sisters', though many of them have abandoned me because they think that I have abandoned them.... I assuage white guilt. I disprove black inadequacy and prove to my parents' generation that their patience was indeed a virtue (McClain, cited in Klose 1984:C3).

As she matured as a journalist, her commitment to the ideals espoused by the larger American society was constantly challenged, especially during and immediately after the election of Harold Washington, the first Black mayor of that city. Sadly, although McClain had denied the existence of racism as an endemic feature of the American social system, she slowly began to realize that it is a critical component of Black Americans' social reality, adversely affecting all components of their lives, leading to what she described as her "hellish confusion" (McClain 1983). Accepting this reality proved to be too burdensome for her.

Because her "success" was seen as more than just the individual mobility of a person by both the Black and white communities, the stresses and conflicts she experienced were more severe and less amenable to self-correction. Unlike "pathfinders" in other social groups, McClain became a "racial symbol". Indeed, being a "racial symbol" appears to be one of the more salient consequences for Black Americans who "make it"; they are no longer functioning as individuals but become, instead, positive or negative symbols for the whole of Black America, especially if their work is in a dominant institution that for centuries would not allow Blacks access to the higher subsistence roles they currently occupy in these predominantly white settings.

Campbell (1982) further documents racelessness as a strategy on the part of Black Americans who choose and/or who are chosen to work in settings that have been historically off limits to them. She notes the duality of their existence in such settings and the resulting feeling of alienation and isolation.

> They consciously choose their speech, their walk, their mode of dress and car; they trim their hair lest a mountainous Afro set them apart. They know they have a high visibility, and they realize that their success depends not only on their abilities [emphasis added], but also on their white colleagues' feeling comfortable with them (Campbell 1982:39).

Not only are Black Americans who gain entry into these predominantly white institutions subject to experience enormous stress, feelings of isolation and ambivalence; they are also likely to be looked at with suspicion by other Black people--Blacks who are not themselves working in such culturally different institutions and who tend to be viewed by other members of the Black community as "un-black" people.

> Many times, other blacks feel that these strange creatures with three-piece suits and briefcases have sold out. "A black manager can have a multi-million dollar deal on his mind," explains Dr. [Ronald] Brown of San Francisco. "But when he passes that black janitor, he knows that he'd better remember to speak; otherwise, he'll be labeled as 'acting white'" (Campbell 1982:100).

It is not surprising that most Black adolescents are keenly aware of the negative sanctions associated with being Black in America, and they either choose the raceless persona or they develop complex strategies which enable them to minimize the influence and impact of the schooling process on their peer relationships. This response on the part of Black adolescents is often described as an "anti-achievement ethic" (Granat et al. 1986). Students who opt for the raceless persona do so at some risk to their feelings of belonging and group membership:

> A black teenager in Prince George's County [outside Washington, D.C.] says many black kids "think if you succeed, you're betraying your color." Adds a friend: "The higher you get, the fewer blacks there are. You can succeed, but you feel like an outcast" (Granat et al. 1986:166).

Nonetheless, some Black students consciously choose risking acceptance in the fictive kinship system which symbolizes the actual texture and structure of the cultural organization in the Black community and, as noted above, to which all persons socially defined as Black are "eternally bound" in order to achieve academic success and ultimately vertical mobility. The following examples are cases in point:

> "They [my friends and family] don't want to change. They want me to be just like them.... I'm trying very hard to get away from black people. When I was in that all [Black] school, of course, my friends were all [Black]. But I don't have any more [Black] friends right now. I live in a all [Black] area, but I don't even talk to anybody who lives near me. I wanted to find out what white people were all about. So when I went to high school, I tried to make new friends and get away from the black people as much as possible.... I've tried to maintain an image of myself in the school--getting away from those people. I work, and I buy my own clothes, and I study hard. In fact, I have all 'A's in my classes and I'm in many of the white activities, like Speech--the only [Black person] in the whole group.... The only other thing I fear is the toughies at school. I don't argue with them at all although sometimes it's hard because, if you try to avoid an argument, they say you're conceited" (cited in Petroni and Hirsch 1971:12, 20).

Gray (1985) notes with painful poignancy her largely unsuccessful efforts at disguising her racial identity, her "un-black" role.

> During my pompous period, I dealt with my insecurities by wearing a veil of superiority. Except around my family and neighbors, I played the role--the un-black.
>
> To whites, I tried to appear perfect--I earned good grades and spoke impeccable English, was well-mannered and well-groomed. Poor whites, however, made me nervous. They seldom concealed their contempt for blacks, especially 'uppity' ones like me....
>
> To blacks, I was all of the above and extremely stuck up. I pretended not to see them on the street, spoke to them only when spoken to and cringed in the presence of blacks being loud in front of whites. The

> more integrated my Catholic grammar school became, the more uncomfortable I was there. I had heard white parents on TV, grumbling about blacks ruining their schools; I didn't want anyone to think that I, too, might bring down Sacred Heart Academy. So I behaved, hoping that no one would associate me with 'them' [other Black Americans] (Gray 1985:E1,E5).

Gray goes on to recount how this strategy--racelessness--proved to be more and more difficult to follow as she progressed from grammar to junior and senior high school, noting specifically the inverse correlation between her emerging sexual development and acceptability as a peer by her classmates.

The common theme in all of these examples is the persistent conflict and ambivalence experienced by Black Americans in both the school and work settings regarding real acceptance by their Black and white peers. Ironically, this conflict and ambivalence appears to be more pronounced and debilitating among those Black Americans who achieve the greatest degree of success, as defined by the dominant society. A discussion of how this phenomenon--racelessness--is evinced at Capital High School is presented below.

IV. RACELESSNESS AT CAPITAL HIGH

Elsewhere (Fordham 1982b, 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b, 1986) I have described in great detail the Capital High School (a pseudonym) and the community in which it is located. At this time, I shall simply note that the school is located in a predominantly Black section of the city of Washington, D.C. At the time of my research study--1982-83 and 1983-84--, the school's official statistics were as follows: total population, 1,886 students; 1,868 were Black. Two (2) Hispanic and 16 white students were identified as the remaining members of the student body.[2] A large number of the students live

[2]Source: District of Columbia Public Schools, Division of Research and Quality Assurance.

in subsidized housing, and are eligible for either the free or reduced lunch program. In summary, the research setting is characterized by students whose parents' education, income and social status make them poor, and whose perceptions of the opportunity structure and their future in it might accurately be described as "small" (see deLone 1979).

Ethnographic data obtained from the small sample of students involved in the research during the base year of the study--1982--are the bases for the perceptions which inform the analysis which follows. Thirty-three (33) eleventh-grade students participated in the study. For this presentation, data from 12 of the high-achieving students--6 males and 6 females--were analyzed. Sex-specific differences were found to be significant in the students' willingness to pursue school success. Consequently, this brief analysis will highlight gender-specific responses and their connection to the issue of racelessness.

Racelessness and school success appear to be linked at Capital High. This is evident in many aspects of the lives of the students and in their responses to questions regarding Black life and culture. This phenomenon--racelessness--also appears to be more prevalent behaviorally among the high-achieving students, although the verbal responses of both groups of students--high- and underachieving--indicate a tendency to disaffiliate or put social distance between themselves and other Black Americans. Essentially, these students' responses indicate a strong belief in the dominant ideology of the American social system: equality of opportunity for all, regardless of race, color, creed or national origin. Some examples from my research site are instructive.

A. The Female High-Achieving Students

The most salient characteristic shared by the female members of the research sample is their unequivocal commitment to the values and beliefs of the dominant social system. Unlike the male students whose "duality of socialization" is clearly evident in both their behaviors and responses, the female students appear to be much less victimized by the fact that they are required to live in two worlds concurrently. Indeed, they appear to be much more unanimously committed to the ideology and values of the larger society than they are to the norms and values of the existing fictive kinship system. The following three examples are illustrative of how the female students' commitment to racelessness as a strategy for vertical mobility structures their behavior and performance in the school context.

Rita is one of the highest-achieving female students in the sample group. She is a 16-year-old student who takes most of the courses available to eleventh graders from the Advanced Placement series at Capital. Unlike the other female students who are the quiet, retiring type, Rita is not obedient, passive, attractive, shy, or withdrawn. Perhaps the best adjectives to describe her are: intelligent, creative, hostile, sarcastic, assertive, garrulous, comedic and manipulative. It is also appropriate to describe her as kind, caring, complex, clever, confused, and troubled, often ripping apart the norms, values and rules of the school with the savagery and fierceness of a tigress, vacillating between demanding total adherence to these ideals on the part of her teachers and other school administrators, and discounting and disparaging these same norms herself in ways which display a blatant disregard and arrogance for their sanctity and values. These characteristics appear to make Rita a very unfeeling and thoughtless person. This is not an accurate picture of this student. Admittedly, she is angry and she

does not know how to focus her anger; however, she is also a very sensitive person whose "hellish confusion" is the result of her efforts to cope with the disparaged economic and social conditions of Black Americans. Her confusion is so intense and so rampant that she told me on more than one occasion that she is often flabbergasted when people ask her if she views herself as a white person.

> ...Some--a lot of times I have people ask me that--"Do you think you are a white person?!" But I don't know, maybe it's me. Maybe I don't carry myself like a Black person. I don't know. But I'm Black. And I can't go painting myself white or some other color, it's something that I have to live with. So it's the way it is, and it's not like having to live with herpes or something--it's not bad. It's--I think it's just the same as being white, as far as I'm concerned--everybody's equal (Formal Interview, May 4, 1983:109).

However, despite her verbal claims that she does not view being Black in America as a negative factor, her constant disparagement of those activities and events which are generally associated with Black Americans negate her claims, suggesting, instead, a highlighting of those activities her family and some of her friends view as "white activities." She insists that her mother and sisters view her as an anti-social person because she does not like to do the things they like to do, e.g., going to shows at Constitution Hall and the Capital Center, cabarets and other activities frequented by Black Washingtonians.

> ...They [my family] go to all the shows, go out to the Capital Center and all that crap, and listen to all that trash--as far as I'm concerned. But I don't really like going out [there], you know, but if I ask them to to see the Washington Philharmonics with me, they won't go. "Is that opera?" [they want to know].... And they don't go to the museums with me either, 'cause they don't think, they'd go crazy, they'd rather go to the movies to see Eddie Murphy in "48 Hours" than to go see "To Fly" at the Air and Space Museum, and so... (Formal Interview, January 12, 1983:18-19).

Her desire to disaffiliate with the Black community is even more evident in response to a question about the kind of music she listens to and the kind of albums she buys:

> Black music is meaningless to me.... The lyrics. I mean, they, "Oh, it got a nice beat, so it must be good," you know, but that's not always, you know, like that. And so...oh, well...you know...it's just meaningless, you know. You listen to the lyrics sometime, and Black artists, you know, just into meaningless music. And I think I listen to Stevie Wonder because, you know, all of his records usually have, you know, some sort of meaning, like his "Hotter Than July" album, you know, like--what is it?--"Happy Birthday," "Hotter Than July"...it's meaningful. But Vanity 6, "Nasty Girls," I mean, what's that, really? It's not--it's just trash...as far as I'm concerned.... So I start[ed] listening to WPGC...instead of OK-100 (Formal Interview, January 12, 1983:18-19).

There are other, even stronger, indicators of Rita's desire to disaffiliate with the fictive kinship system extant in the Black community. This is particularly apparent in her response to a question I asked her about her identity.

> Anthropologist: Do you identify with Black people?
>
> Rita: I identify with Blacks and whites alike--I don't--see, that's one thing I don't go for: I don't like when people ask me do I identify with Black people or do I identify with white people? I identify with people. People are people, Black or white, Spanish, red, white or blue, we're all the same (Formal Interview, May 4, 1983:110).

The tone of her voice when she responded to the above question conveyed to me much more than her idealistic response ever could. She was clearly offended by my question and felt personally attacked by my inquiry. I apologized, but felt compelled to try and understand the latent feelings this young woman has about her identity as a Black American. Apparently, she subsumes her identity as a Black American to her identity as an American, hoping that a raceless

persona will mitigate the harsh treatment and severe limitations in the opportunity structure which are likely to confront her as a Black American.

Despite Rita's assertions that she does not feel any pressure to disaffiliate with Black Americans, her response to the large amount of literature she has begun to receive from the various colleges since her Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) scores were posted, is clearly indicative of her ambivalence and confusion about racial identity. She has been forced to acknowledge that distinctions between people based on race are quite rampant and even found in the "halls of ivy," her protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. Rita's racelessness was directed at the core of the ideology of the American social system which maintains that differences of race, religion and national origin are not important. However, her belief in this ideology is constantly tested when she is forced to acknowledge, and/or others around her are constantly reminding her, that such distinctions not only exist but are critically important in the dominant American society. The current literature she is receiving from colleges indicating that special consideration is given to Black and other "minority" students is a case in point.

> I mean--okay, this college sent me a Third World--I mean, they said, "We have a Third World Club"--place for Blacks! I mean, the audacity! To even <u>think</u> that I would go to a college that has a club for Blacks! I was.... Okay, Middlebury--I went to the coll--but they sent me this little pamphlet that said, "Minorities at Middlebury"--like, "Do they exist?" or something like that.... I mean, it's like--"well, we put them aside in some other place," or something -- I don't care. I say, well, I mean, I <u>suppose</u> minorities go there--I mean, I guess at least a <u>few</u> of them--there <u>were</u> only twenty-five there, out of the whole school. <u>But</u>, nevertheless, I <u>know</u> that they're there, and I don't need to know that <u>they</u>'re there by you sending me this pamphlet. I don't appreciate it! (Formal Interview, May 4, 1983:107-108)

Rita is convinced that if only people--Black and white--would begin to seriously discount race as a factor in their interactions with each other, discrimination and other invidious distinctions would disappear. It is in connection with this belief system that she has built the raceless persona she presents in the school and non-school context. Her commitment to the ideology of the dominant social system is what structures her academic effort and performance in the school context, motivating her to strive for academic excellence.

A second example of racelessness as a factor in the academic achievement of the high-achieving females is the case of Katrina. Katrina has the highest GPA (grade point average) of any student in the research sample, enabling her to graduate as the Valedictorian of the Class of 1984. In comparison with Rita, Katrina's personality is dull. However, like Rita, she is able to perform well on school measures of success, both in the classroom context and on standardized measures.

Like Rita, Katrina is not sure that Black Americans have a viable cultural system. Her uncertainty stems from her lack of attention to the issue rather than some strongly held views on the matter. When I insisted that she describe for me what she thinks of when she thinks of Black culture, she sighed and finally responded by saying: "Music. Dance." Regrettably, like Rita, Katrina does not like contemporary Black music and avoids those radio stations which are most often identified with the Black community. She views the music played on those stations (e.g., OK-100, KYS, etc.) as being too "rowdy"; she also does not like the regular TV serials, preferring old movies, especially the ones with such stars as Doris Day, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The fact that both she and Rita tend to eschew Black music

is an important aspect of their raceless personae, given the symbolic significance of indigenous music in the Black community.[3]

More importantly, like many of the other student members of the research sample, Katrina believes in the democratic ideals of the nation, and wants Black and white Americans to live peaceably and contentedly. In fact, she opposes any effort on the part of Black Americans to separate themselves from the majority culture. Her belief in the fairness and openness of the opportunity structure is primarily responsible for her commitment to school norms and academic achievement.

Katrina's responses to the questions about Black life and culture, and her explanation for the massive poverty in the Black community suggest that she is not the least bit certain about the answers she offers and, more importantly, her responses indicate that she has not given much thought to the nature and configuration of the social organization of the Black community. She has not given much thought to these questions, in part because they are not discussed or talked about a lot in the school context as part of the core curriculum.

Additionally, while Katrina claims that she has no real label preference for how she should be identified, the fact that she has no preference suggests a desire to appear raceless or non-Black. Like Rita, she believes that hard work on the part of Black Americans is the key to the elimination of economic and social differences between Black and white Americans, and, as noted above, she holds Black Americans primarily responsible for their present

---

[3]The findings emerging from this study re Black music and other forms of indigenous entertainment in the Black community indicate that they are critical symbols of group unity and solidarity. Consequently, students who do not identify with these aspects of Black American culture are perhaps unwittingly avoiding an important symbol of membership in the fictive kinship system and shared behavioral patterns.

lower class status because, in her mind, Black Americans are basically lazy. Her acceptance of the widely held stereotypic image of Black Americans motivates her to try to be an exception to the rule. She does not want other people to view her in the same way, i.e., as a lazy person. This persistent negative perception of Black Americans motivated her to develop the kind of raceless persona which is so much a part of the person she is today. Because she has defined success for her as going "to college, and graduate in the highest percentile...a nice steady job [that] pays well...travel...and friends," she constantly seeks to disassociate herself from the negative stereotypes which are so much a part of the daily social reality of Black Americans.

Katrina has been able to maintain a high level of proficiency on school measures of success while at the same time muting the hostility of her peers and classmates who might otherwise use boundary-maintaining mechanisms to limit her efforts at social mobility. She has done this by developing a persona which makes her appear virtually raceless in the school context. Among her schoolmates and peers, Katrina's raceless persona is characterized by her inconspicuousness and seeming invisibility; to her teachers and other representatives of the dominant society, her racelessness is evident in her strong commitment to the values and norms condoned in the school context and the larger society, as well as her disavowal of those features of the Black community which are rejected by the school and the larger social system (e.g., the speaking of non-standard English, commitment to group advancement rather than individual mobility, etc.). Racelessness as a strategy for social mobility is also evident in her willingness to put forth the effort necessary to excel in those arenas and aspects of the school curriculum which have traditionally been defined as the purview of white Americans.

Maggie is the third example of how the high-achieving females work to develop a raceless persona in the school context, putting social distance between themselves and their peers in order to enhance the possibility that they will actually experience social mobility as adults in the social system. Maggie is a 17-year-old student with a high GPA whose repertoire of core courses comes from the regular curriculum offerings at the school. This is not a particularly unproductive strategy for Maggie, since her mother and maternal family members provide her with such a strong support system for academic achievement. Her mother, who forms the base of this support system, is uncompromising in her insistence on behavior befitting a "young lady" and the appropriate grades at this level of schooling. In fact, the support system is so strong that it tends to have many unintended consequences, at least from Maggie's perspective.

Not surprisingly, Maggie does not consider herself as having a lot of friends, either at school or in her immediate neighborhood. Indeed, she insists that she has virtually no contact with the people in her neighborhood, so all of her friends are either girls and boys she knows at school and/or, in a more limited number, people she knows from church. She claims to know no one from her neighborhood, despite the fact that she has lived with her parents in the same single-family "townhouse" for more than ten years. She insists that her knowledge of the people in the neighborhood is so severely limited because her parents, particularly her mother, are afraid that she will become involved in taking drugs and other undesirable behaviors if she gets too familiar with the neighborhood residents; therefore, they demand that she eschew friendships and relationships with the neighborhood residents. This avoidance of the people who are constantly around her, has taught her to

view herself as being different from those people, despite the fact that racially they are very similar: they too are Black Americans.

Perhaps the most contradictory component of Maggie's life--both in and outside the school context--is reflected in her efforts to come to grips with being Black in a country where being Black is disvalued. This reality has led to the development of identity problems for her; problems which are exacerbated by her lighter skin color. She admits that her fairer skin color is not as problematic today as it was when she was in elementary and junior high school, where she was frequently referred to as "yellow." This description of her was so pervasive when she was in elementary school that she came to see herself as being raceless, neither Black nor white. When asked to choose one of the various labels used to identify Black Americans (i.e., "Black," "Negro," "Colored," "Afro-American," etc.), she responded in the following manner:

> I wouldn't consider myself as none of them. When I was small, people used to say I was yellow, right?, so I thought--I really thought I was yellow. I didn't think I was Black. I thought I was a Mongoloid. So all these--all this time I've been--well, not recently--I thought I was yellow until I got into--maybe around the 6th, 7th grade. Then my mother told me I wasn't yellow, 'cause on the papers when we used to fill out, I used to put "Yellow" on it, you know, for "Black, White or Other"?... I would put "Other" or put "Yellow" on it, 'cause people used to call me "yellow." And my mother told me that I was Black.... I kind of felt different. I felt like a different person. I said, "All this time I thought I was yellow. And now I'm Black..." (Formal Interview, February 25, 1983).

The residual effect of this misidentification is still a part of Maggie's identity structure, aiding and abetting her conscious and unconscious desire to be an "exception to the rule." Part of the reason for her reluctance to be identified as a Black American stems from the fact that, perhaps unwittingly, she accepts many of the popular negative stereotypes regarding

the behavior and lifeways of Black Americans, magnifying her desire to disaffiliate with the larger Black community. As with most of the other female high achievers, her family buttresses her perception of being different. In the school context, this perception is reinforced by her teachers and other school officials who constantly reassure her that her willingness to work at achieving school success is both laudable and evidence of her lack of affiliation with her peers and other Black Americans. Not surprisingly, the juxtaposition of her desire to disaffiliate, and her eternal and unbreakable bond and obligation to the Black community (Taylor 1973) exacerbate her uncertainty and confusion regarding racial affiliation.

In summary, as this analysis demonstrates, the female high achievers' raceless personae exist, but not without an enormous amount of conflict and uncertainty. In the school, racelessness enables them to put social distance between themselves and the popular, negative stereotypes generally ascribed to Black Americans. Among the female students described in this analysis, racelessness as a strategy for social mobility is not limited to the school and/or classroom context; rather, these young women tend to internalize the values, beliefs and ideals taught and learned in school, making them a part of their behavior pattern in their family and community environments. In this way, racelessness becomes a definite part of their lives, creating enormous stress and anxiety. Moreover, this raceless response to the duality of their existence puts social distance between them and their less successful peers, enabling them to pursue goals and objectives that under the scrutiny and careful eyes of their peers might be severely criticized. As this analysis shows, the female high achievers vacillate between inconspicuousness among their less successful peers and carefully constructed racelessness in the presence of their teachers and other representatives of the dominant

social system. A discussion of how racelessness among the male high achievers is manifested is presented next.

B. The Male High-Achieving Students

A common theme in the responses--verbal and behavioral--of the male high-achieving students is their commitment to the ideology of the American social system, and the sense of conflict and uncertainty about their dual relationship with the larger dominant society and the indigenous fictive kinship system of the Black community. This uncertainty and the resultant conflict force them to repeatedly question their identity, leading to a strategy which highlights their relationship to the dominant society while at the same time maintaining their relationship to the Black community and the existing fictive kinship system. Some examples from my research are instructive of how the development of a raceless persona enables them to succeed in the school context. Kent is a case in point.

Kent is one of the most unusual students at Capital High in that he appears to be unaffected by his peers' perception and/or acceptance of him. He appears to be both adult- and goal-oriented. He makes good grades in school, never cuts class, nor has he missed a day in school since seventh grade. He was selected the male Valedictorian of his junior high school graduating class. Kent loves track and could probably earn a track scholarship were he to participate in that sport at Capital; however, he recently resigned from the track team because he concluded that it interfered with his ability to complete his math homework when he went home after practice. His teachers generally consider him to be a hardworking and serious young man. He is often asked to introduce guests or make oratorical presentations in the school assemblies. As a tenth grader, he won First Place in the Science

Fair's citywide and regional competitions, and was one of the final contestants at the national level. He also took first honors in the citywide History Fair for a project he undertook on the relationship between Japan and the United States vis-a-vis the automobile industry. He attends the Upward Bound Program at Georgetown University on Saturdays, primarily because he wants to better himself. No one demands that he attend this program, nor does he get extra credit for going to the Upward Bound Program on Saturdays. It is an activity he enjoys, and it reinforces his desire to "be somebody." His commitment to the value of schooling is unquestioned. He is absolutely sure that if an individual does well in school, he will succeed in the larger society. For example, he was taking the Drivers' Education course during the first semester of his junior year, but refused to go downtown to get his learner's permit because it would have meant that he would have had to miss several of his classes and he did not want to do that.

Kent readily admits that he wants to be successful in life, and that is why he is making the sacrifices he is currently making. He is willing to forgo "fun," parties, track, or whatever in order to achieve this goal. In fact, his goal-directed behavior is so intense that his mother frequently expresses concern for his mental health. She is constantly urging him to "slow down," "take a day off," all of which he ignores.

Like most of the high-achieving males participating in this study, Kent's view of why Black Americans are generally poor is both ambivalent and contradictory. He attributes the widespread poverty among Black Americans to their lack of adequate schooling. This lack of adequate schooling is not, in his view, due to a lack of availability but is, instead, due to Black Americans' general eschewal of great effort in the school context.

Not surprisingly, Kent's view of success is unlike that of many of the students at the school. Instead of viewing success as an end which one could clearly identify with tangible symbols, he sees success as an ongoing, elusive process. His definition incorporates the idea of job security and education, but it is much larger than these phenomena. Each "success," he argues, is but a small step on the road to much larger symbols of success. Like most of the other students I interviewed, Kent counts "a good job" and "money" as critical components of success; he also identifies effort as an important factor in whether the individual is likely to achieve his or her goal.

In general, Kent's commitment to the ideology and values which are sanctioned by the larger society and which are, at the same time, in conflict with many aspects of the ideology and values of the existing fictive kinship system in the Black community, suggests the need for resolution of juxtaposed cultural systems. Clearly, he has made the decision to highlight the values, beliefs and ideology of the larger society over the values and beliefs of the indigenous fictive kinship system which exists both at Capital High and in the Capital Community. Where these values collide, the values and beliefs of the dominant culture take precedence over those of the fictive kinship system. For Kent and other students who opt for the same response, the emergence of a raceless persona is mandated. He realizes that his friends view him in ways which are not always flattering. In fact, he spends a lot of time alone, both at school and when he is home. His classmates and peers do not attack him because he is not boisterous and/or arrogant in their view. Many of them see him as somewhat "strange," but a nice fellow nonetheless. Not surprisingly, he is constantly juggling his school personae in order to minimize the risks associated with the pursuit of school success.

At the same time, he is keenly aware of the pervasive doubt regarding his academic abilities as manifested in his teachers' general distrust of his abilities, his outstanding achievements to the contrary notwithstanding. The common theme is the conflict between the two cultural systems which compete for his loyalty: the fictive kinship system and the dominant social system. Hence his raceless persona is not without conflict and ambivalence. Kent's efforts to achieve disaffiliation or racelessness by minimizing his indelible connectedness to the fictive kinship system and the Black community are not without negative consequences for him.

Still another example of how the successful Black males at the school seek to develop a persona which will enable them to achieve academic excellence and acceptance in the dominant society, is the case of Wendell. Over the years, Wendell has prided himself on his ability to make excellent grades in school while preserving the appearance of total commitment to the Black community. He has been able to do this because, until this point in his schooling, he has not had to study in order to earn the excellent grades he has traditionally received. Like most of the other male students, he makes an enormous distinction between studying and doing homework, with most of them acknowledging that they do not study but they almost never leave home without their homework completed. The only real effort Wendell has made toward the development of a raceless persona is the obtainment of excellent grades in elementary and junior high school. Indeed, his excellent grades in junior high school earned him the title of Valedictorian of his ninth grade class. He does not want to be identified as being different from his peers, and the pressure of trying to live up to the expectations associated with being "smart," while at the same time minimizing the social distance between him and his peers, are too overwhelming. Not surprisingly, Wendell began to

pursue academic excellence in response to the persistence of stereotypic myths which suggest that Black Americans, as a social group, are "ignorant." Because he has recently begun to see his future as being intimately linked to his racial group affiliation, his academic effort has diminished considerably. He no longer seeks to distinguish himself from his peers in the one way he had sought distinction prior to senior high school: through the obtainment of high grades in school without much effort. He has come to this stage in his development primarily because his perception of the opportunity structure is less governed by the official ideology of the dominant social system than it is by the informal rules and regulations operative in the extant fictive kinship system. He has come to believe that a raceless persona is not all he has traditionally thought it to be. Hence, the only distinction he made between himself and his peers--obtaining good grades in school--is no longer a worthwhile option for him, especially given the fact that he must now put forth effort in order to receive grades comparable to those he received in elementary and junior high school.

Martin represents still another example of how the male high-achieving students seek to distinguish themselves from their peers by the development of a repertoire of skills and behaviors which are generally attributed to non-Black students. While Martin maintains that he is in many ways different from his peers at Capital, primarily because he earns good grades in school, he also notes with painful poignancy his efforts to cloak a raceless persona. Because he earns good grades in school, he is ever mindful of the fear of being labeled a "brainiac" or, alternatively, a "pervert brainiac." To be known as a "brainiac" is bad enough, but to be known as a "pervert brainiac" is tantamount to receiving the kiss of death. Additionally, he claims that for a male student to be known as a "pervert brainiac" raises questions about

his manhood; to be known as a "pervert brainiac" leaves little doubt. Consequently, it is, in his view, important for male students at Capital to be careful of their school personae and to cloak them in other activities which minimize the harm which is likely to follow from being known as a brainiac. Moreover, he claims that there are persistent rumors that some of the male students taking all or a large number of the Advanced Placement courses at the school are homosexuals. On the other hand, virtually none of the male students in the regular courses at the school is accused of being gay. Consequently, in an effort to minimize the possibility of being known as a brainiac, and thereby bringing one's manhood into question, male students who are doing well in school often resort to "lunching," i.e., to behaviors which suggest that they are clowns or comedians or some other non-conventional personality.

Martin's perception of Black Americans is fraught with conflict and contradictions. For example, he identifies discrimination and prejudice as being widely practiced by white Americans, thus limiting Black Americans' efforts to improve their economic, political and social condition.

> Like I said, they [Black Americans] don't care. That's what I say. They don't care.... I mean, they'll stand on the corner, smoke marijuana, and all that. And I think it's--I don't know why nobody--you know, they won't get theirself together, but I think that they just don't care (Formal Interview, March 23, 1983:80-81).

Martin sees himself as being different from most other Black Americans in that he "care[s] what people think of [him]. [He] always tr[ies] to [make] a good impression on people. [He] always care[s]..." (Formal Interview, March 23, 1983:79). His view of himself as being different from the masses of Black people is influential in his commitment, albeit limited, to school achievement. It is his commitment to "impression management," as well

as the persistent negative stereotypes associated with Black Americans, which motivate him to work at the development of a raceless persona.

In summary, when one looks at the responses of the high-achieving males and females in the school context, racelessness appears to be a much more important variable in school achievement for the female students than it is for the male students. For the male students, school achievement appears to be much more confusing and conflict-laden than it is for their female counterparts. Some of the reasons for this ambiguity are identified and described in the examples cited above. Suffice it to note here that for most of the male students, racelessness does not appear to have the appeal and influence on male school behavior as it does for the female students. Moreover, for most of the male students participating in the study, racelessness appears to be limited primarily to the classroom context, with most of them reverting to the norms and behaviors which are sanctioned and condoned by the existing fictive kinship system which I have postulated undergirds the behavior and expectations of members of the Black community.

V. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper I have suggested that Black students' academic performance is positively affected by the development of a raceless persona. Racelessness is operationally defined as a concept which captures the endemic tensions and conflicts experienced by the high-achieving students as they seek to define their dual relationship to the indigenous cultural system in the Black community and the atomistic, impersonal cultural system of the dominant American social order. Moreover, because the atomistic cultural system of the dominant society predominates in the school context, in order to achieve school success, Black American adolescents believe that they must make a

choice; they do not believe, nor does their experience support, the idea that they can truly be bicultural in the school context and succeed. Instead, their experiential background supports the value of appearing raceless to their teachers and other adults in the school context. This becomes problematic because many of their peers do not share this value. Consequently, many of the students find themselves in a situation which leads them to have to juggle their personae in order to minimize the conflict and anxieties which are the result of massive dissimulation in the presence of the various constituencies represented in the school context.

As this analysis demonstrates, racelessness among Black adolescents is influenced by gender, with the female high-achieving students appearing to be much more willing to be closely identified with the values and beliefs of the dominant social system. On the other hand, when compared with their female counterparts, the high-achieving males appeared to be far less committed to the cultural system of the larger society and therefore far more confused, ambivalent and uncertain about the value of forsaking their initial indigenous beliefs and values. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, the male students, like their female counterparts, do believe that school and schooling are a primary means of achieving vertical mobility for Black Americans in the existing social system. Hence, even more than the female students, the high-achieving male students mask their raceless personae in the school context. The experiences and responses of the high-achieving students at Capital High to the pervasive resistance of strong identification to the Black community parallel those of Black adults in the work force, especially those members who have actually achieved some semblance of "success" above the existing job ceiling. In other words, like their "successful" adult counterparts, they seek to minimize the discomfort level of those members of

the dominant society and their representatives whose responsibility it is to evaluate them as they seek admittance to institutions which are governed by dominant group norms and standards. If they are not successful in minimizing their ethnic group membership, i.e., they are unable to appear raceless, their chances of achieving their desired goal--vertical mobility--are seriously diminished.

What are some of the implications of this analysis? Is racelessness among Black adolescents a pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory? First, this analysis suggests that, given the social reality which confronts people of African descent in America, minimization of one's ethnicity and ethnic group membership among Black adolescents appears to be a prerequisite to school success at Capital High School. Also, as the literature review presented here shows, the response of the high-achieving students at Capital does not differ drastically from that of Black people in other school contexts, nor does the response differ from that reported by "successful" adults in diverse work settings. All of these Americans report experiencing an inordinate amount of stress and feelings of alienation which are not offset by the great success they achieve in settings which have traditionally been off limits to Black Americans. Moreover, for many of them, success in these settings represents a pyrrhic victory.

Is the development of a raceless persona and academic excellence among the high-achieving students at Capital High a pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory? The answer to this question is both complex and complicated. At the individual level, the high-achieving students' achievement of their self-defined goals appears to be enhanced by their development of a raceless persona. Hence racelessness appears to be a pragmatic strategy at this level. However, when one looks at what Taylor (1973) describes as all Black people's

eternal bond and obligation to the Black community, "irrespective of [their] economic, educational or social status," then perhaps racelessness in exchange for vertical mobility is indeed a pyrrhic victory.

REFERENCES

Anderson, James D.
1975 Education as a Vehicle for the Manipulation of Black Workers. In Work, Technology, and Education: Dissenting Essays in the Intellectual Foundations of American Education, Walter Feinberg and H. Rosemont, Jr. (eds.). Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Bloch, Maurice
1971 The Moral and Tactical Meaning of Kinship Terms. Man 6:79-87.

Bradley, David
1982 Black and American, 1982. Esquire. May:58-64,69.

Brain, James J.
1972 Kinship Terms. Man 7(1):137-138.

Bullock,
1970

Campbell, Bebe Moore
1982 Black Executives and Corporate Stress. The New York Times Magazine 1-42.

Cohen, Yehudi A.
1971 The Shaping of Men's Minds: Adaptation to the Imperatives of Culture. In Anthropological Perspectives on Education, M. L. Wax, S. Diamond and F. Gearing (eds.). New York: Basic Books, Inc.

deLone, Richard H.
1979 Small Futures: Children, Inequality, and the Limits of Liberal Reform. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

DeVos, George A.
1967 Japan's Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dickeman, Mildred
1973 Teaching Cultural Pluralism. In Teaching Ethnic Studies: Concepts and Strategies, James A. Banks (ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies.

Drake, St. Clair, and Cayton, Horace R.
1970 Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

DuBois, W. E. Burghardt
1970 The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Washington Square Press.

Folb, Edith
1980 Runnin' Down Some Lines: The Language and Culture of Black Teenagers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Fordham, Signithia
1981a Differentiated Schooling in Internally Colonized Social Systems: A Cultural Ecological Perspective. Paper presented at the 24th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Bloomington, Indiana, October 24.

1981b Black Student School Success as Related to Fictive Kinship: A Study in the Washington, D.C. Public School System. Washington, D.C.: A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to the Department of Anthropology, The American University.

1982a Black Student School Success as Related to Fictive Kinship: An Ethnographic Study in the Washington, D.C., Public School System. A Research Proposal Submitted to the National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C., February 2.

1982b Cultural Inversion and Black Children's School Performance. A paper presented at the 81st Annual Meeting, American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., December 3-7.

1983 Afro-Caribbean and Native Black American School Performance in Washington, D.C. Paper presented at the 82nd Annual Meeting, American Anthropological Association, Chicago, Illinois, November 17-20.

1984a Afro-Caribbean and Native Black American School Performance in Washington, D.C.: Learning To Be or Not To Be a Native. An Invited Lecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, Lectures on Ethnography and Education, April 12.

1984b Ethnography in a Black High School: Learning Not To Be a Native. A paper presented at the 83rd Annual Meeting, American Anthropological Association, Denver, Colorado, November 14-18.

1985a Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of Acting White. Paper presented at the 84th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., December 5.

1985b Black Student School Success as Related to Fictive Kinship: An Ethnographic Study in the Washington, D.C., Public School System. Final Report Submitted to the National Institute of Education.

1986 Black Student School Success: An Ethnographic Study in a Large Urban Public School System. A Preliminary Report Submitted to the Spencer Foundation, Chicago, Illinois.

Fordham, Signithia, and Ogbu, John U.
In Press Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of Acting White. The Urban Review 18(3).

Fortes, Meyer
1969 Kinship and the Social Order: The Legacy of Lewis Henry Morgan. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Freed, Stanley A.
1973 Fictive Kinship in a North Indian Village. Ethnology II(1):86-103.

Gaines-Carter, Patricia
1984 Quiet Thunder: On a Roll with Donnie Simpson. The Washington Post Magazine, June 17:6-7.

Glazer, Nathan, and Moynihan, Daniel P.
1963 Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish in New York City. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Gordon, Milton
1964 Assimilation in American Life. New York: Oxford University Press.

Granat, Diane; Hathaway, P.; Saletan, W; and Sansing, J.
1986 Blacks and Whites in Washington: How Separate? How Equal? A Special Report. The Washingtonian 22(1): 152-182.

Gray, Jacqueline
1985 A Black American Princess: New Game, New Rules. The Washington Post, March 17:E1,E5.

Green, Vera M.
1981 Blacks in the United States: The Creation of an Enduring People? In Persistent Peoples: Cultural Enclaves in Perspective, George Pierre Castile and Gilbert Kushner (eds.). Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Hale, Janice
1982 Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press.

Haley, Alex
1976 Roots: The Saga of an American Family. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Haskins, Kenneth
1975 You Have No Right to Put a Kid Out of School. In Arthur Tobier, Four Conversations: The Intersection of Private and Public. The Urban Review 8(4):273-287.

Holt, Grace Sims
1972 "Inversion" in Black Communication. In Rappin' and Stylin' Out, Thomas Kochman (ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Klose, Kevin
1984 A Tormented Black Rising Star Dead by Her Own Hand: Leanita McClain: A Pioneer at the Racial Frontier Who Lost Her Way. The Washington Post, Sunday, August 5:C1,C2.

Kushner, Gilbert, and Castile, George P. (Eds.)
1981 Persistent Peoples: Cultural Enclaves in Perspective. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Liebow, Elliot
1967 Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Street-Corner Men. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

McClain, Leanita
1983 How Chicago Taught Me to Hate Whites. The Washington Post, Sunday, July 24:C1;C4.

Mitchell, Jacquelyn
1982 Reflections of a Black Social Scientist: Some Struggles, Some Doubts, Some Hopes. Harvard Educational Review 52(1):27-44.

Myrdal, Gunnar
1944 An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. New York: Harper.

Norbeck, E., and Befu, H.
1958 Informal Fictive Kinship in Japan. American Anthropologist 60:102-117.

Ogbu, John U.
1978 Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective. New York: Academic Press.

1983 Crossing Cultural Boundaries: A Comparative Perspective on Minority Education. A paper presented at a Symposium on "Race, Class, Socialization and the Life Cycle," in Honor of Allison Davis. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago, October 21-22.

Petroni, Frank A., and Hirsch, E. A.
1971 Two, Four, Six, Eight, When You Gonna Integrate? New York: Behavioral Publications.

Pitt-Rivers, Julian
1968 Pseudo-Kinship. In The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, D. L. Sills (ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Sargent, Edward
1985 Freeing Myself: Discoveries That Unshackle the Mind. The Washington Post, February 10:D1,D4.

Scanzoni, John H.
1977 The Black Family in Modern Society: Patterns of Stability and Security. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shimkin, Demitri B.; Shimkin, Edith M.; and Frate, Dennis A.
1978 The Extended Family in Black Societies. Chicago: Mouton Publishers.

Spicer, Edward H.
1971 Persistent Cultural Systems: A Comparative Study of Identity Systems That Can Adapt to Contrasting Environments. Science 174:795-800.

1980 The Yaqui: A Cultural History. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Spivey, Donald A.
1978 Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Stack, Carol
1974 All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community. New York: Harper and Row.

Staples, Robert
1975 To Be Young, Black and Oppressed. The Black Scholar 6:2-9.

1981 The Black American Family. In Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations, C. H. Mindel and R. W. Habenstein (eds.). New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Co., Inc.

Styron, William
1966 The Confessions of Nat Turner. New York: Random House.

Taylor, Stuart A.
1973 Some Funny Things Happen on the Way Up. Contact 5(1): 12-17.

Valentine, Charles A.
1971 Deficit, Difference, and Bicultural Models of Afro-American Behavior. Harvard Educational Review 41(2): 137-157.

Williams, Melvin D.
1981a On the Street Where I Lived. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

1981b Observations in Pittsburgh Ghetto Schools. Anthropology and Education Quarterly XII(3):211-220.